Expanded Theosophical Knowledge

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Vice-President of the
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The Theosophical movement was inaugurated by a great outburst of information relating to the origin and destinies of the human race that had previously been in the exclusive possession of Those we now think of as the Masters of Wisdom. This was richly supplemented during the next few years by teaching coming through the original London Lodge, and published in its Transactions, and by the publication of "The Secret Doctrine" in the year 1888. Since that date I have been frequently able to pass on additional information, and much has come through the writings of Mrs. Besant and Mr. Leadbeater. Within the last seven or eight years it has been my privilege to obtain a great deal of still more extended information, expanding and developing the original sketches, so that I feel now we are in possession of knowledge that may be regarded as the foundation of a real spiritual science. The difference between such clearly defined knowledge and the first vague conclusions we were enabled to form, can hardly be exaggerated.

At the recent Convention of the National Society in Scotland I endeavoured to pass on as much of this expanded knowledge as time and opportunity allowed me to deal with, and I wish now to set down in a more permanent form the detailed information I have been able, within the last seven or eight years to obtain, in reference to three great departments of the vast infinitude covered by the vague phrase, "occultism."

First I propose to deal with the great mystery of Consciousness, one which at the first glance seems the most unfathomable of any we have to study; then to set forth in fuller detail than has hitherto been

found possible, the actual present condition of human life on the planetary chain to which we belong, and thirdly, to show how our comprehension of the realm immediately in touch with the physical life, though just beyond its boundaries, the astral world, has been developed to an extent that we never attempted to reach when Theosophical study thirty-five years ago was mainly directed towards still wider horizons.

THE NATURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Consciousness is recognized by all physiological students as a mystery they do not attempt to explain. We can trace the activities of life back through the muscles and the nerves back to the brain, but whence came the original impulses in obedience to which the brain set the nerves to work on the muscles? That question is left aside as relating to a mystery beyond human understanding. Nor shall I attempt to clear up the mystery in the way we can sometimes accomplish this when dealing with purely physical phenomena; we must be content to treat Consciousness as the fundamental Divine Principle of all manifestation, but the illuminating idea which I want to convey, is that Divine Consciousness, itself, *is*, in its nature, identical with any consciousness of which we can take cognisance; that in a word there is only one kind of Consciousness in all creation—the Consciousness of God, working through vehicles of varying capacity. Limited as we feel our own consciousness to be, it is in its nature identical with that of Infinite Divinity, as in the other direction, with that of animal and even vegetable life. That which may be thought of as the efficient value of consciousness depends upon the vehicle in which it is working. Within the body of a sheep its limitations are narrow indeed, within that of an enlightened human being they seem enormously widened; but whether we

go down in thought far below the sheep level, or ascend in imagination far above the human condition, we shall find that the vehicle of consciousness in all cases determines the extent to which consciousness itself can range over the infinitude of knowledge.

When Darwin first started the evolutionary theory, some of us were inclined to regard him as having made the mistake of concerning himself with vehicles alone, ignoring the concurrent evolution of intellectual and spiritual capacity. Without perhaps fully realising the magnitude of his own achievement, he was embracing in his view of nature both the physical and superphysical processes of evolution. Although by profound study the process can be comprehended even at the level of its obscure beginnings, the principle is better grasped if we confine our attention to the development of consciousness in the human being. By what law is the gradual improvement of the vehicle as time goes on provided for? Putting the answer in a brief phrase, susceptible of further development in detail, the law is that when consciousness within any given vehicle exerts itself to the utmost, or in other words, makes the best use of the vehicle in which it finds itself at any given time, the law—really a part of the great aggregation of Karmic laws—proceeds to invest that volume of consciousness, that Ego, with a better vehicle for its next physical manifestation.

I must here quote a line or two from Tennyson, whose poetry, as we grow to appreciate it, is saturated with occult knowledge. He writes in one fragment to be found in almost the last published volume of his works:—

"The Lord let the house of a brute to the soul of a man;
And man said, Am I your debtor?
The Lord: 'Not yet; but make it as clean as you can,
And then I will let you a better.'"

In these compact lines we have the whole idea I want to convey suggested, if not elaborately expressed. "Make it as clean as you can" means, of course, make the best use of it and establish a karmic claim on an improved house or vehicle. We see the system working as we study the principles of Reincarnation, working, of course, like most processes in nature in what seems at the first glance a lopsided fashion. The lover of music makes the best use of his musical faculties in the life when that desire first governs him and, while perhaps neglecting other possibilities of improvement, he obtains in his next life a vehicle better adapted to the expression of musical thought. So with any other line of human activity. The lover of physical science finds life after life his capacity for comprehending the laws of physical nature ever and ever improving; the philanthropist unconsciously to himself, is imbuing his permanent atoms with an ever-increasing eagerness to benefit his fellow-creatures. Down to the minor developments of intellectual capacity the study of mathematics or philology, the same invariable principle may be discerned. No one can in one life, clean all the rooms in his house, to follow Tennyson's metaphor; but by degrees all in turn will be found to have claimed his attention, with the ultimate result that the Ego acquires a vehicle of consciousness perfected beyond the needs of commonplace life, and passes into the ranks of Those we know something of, the Masters of Wisdom.

As one burst of sunshine may illumine a landscape previously obscured by shadow, this simple idea seems to clear up whole realms of vague speculation concerning the processes we commonly refer to by the vague term "evolution." And by the light so shed on the whole subject, we begin to put a scientific face upon a vast range of cloudy speculation embodied sometimes in the phrase "The Immanence of God in Nature." Imagination, of course,

reaches out vaguely towards the supreme problem: What is the nature of the vehicle within which Divine Consciousness works? and in that direction, at present, at all events, it is useless for us to aspire. But fully appreciated, the present interpretation of consciousness gives unity and meaning to the whole design of creation from mineral manifestation upward through organised life to infinitudes beyond. It will be found to harmonise with every great idea that Theosophical thought has been endeavoring to deal with. A compact phrase I have often been fond of quoting, rests in its significance on the principle I have been endeavoring to define: "Whatever is, is, has been, or will be, human." At the first glance the value of the phrase seems to reside in the promise it holds forth that all human creatures may aspire, in thinking of the possibilities that await them towards absolute infinitudes of glorified existence; and it does that, but it puts, so to speak, a scientific face upon the magnificent prospect, and it fits in with every idea we have been taught to work with concerning the dependence of progress on individual exertion. No one is lifted to a loftier level of being than that on which he finds himself at any given moment, by any Power exterior to himself. Helped by suggestion! Yes, we may all welcome such help as that; we can none of us dispense with it; but the suggestion must in all cases be a hint pointing to individual exertion. Actual progress in every case must be the product of individual will and effort, the effort to make the maximum use of life's opportunities; or, in other words, of the vehicle in which consciousness for the time being is working.

Hardly any of the misty thoughts in which old-fashioned psychology indulged will remain clouded by vagueness when the principle I am dealing with gives them definite shape.

I will venture on a subtle illustration of this idea.

Thinkers who rather resent than aspire to clearly defined knowledge concerning the spiritual aspect of their own nature, are often fond of treating Christ as a state of consciousness. "The awakening of the Christ within us," or some such vague interpretation of the idea, is held preferable to any specific knowledge concerning the levels in the Divine Hierarchy at which we find definitely in manifestation a Being from whom the Christ Principle actually emanates. Attached as many thinkers are to the cloudiness of mysticism, the recognition of such a specific Being seems to them to degrade the idea, and yet with the knowledge concerning the Divine Hierarchy that has been in Theosophical possession almost since the beginning, we know that there is a specific Being at a certain level within the Divine Hierarchy of the Solar System, to whom we may definitely look up as the conscious source of all spiritual influence. This clear knowledge, far from degrading the aspiration in each individual ego to comprehend spirituality, is just as superior to the state of mind with which the mystic is content, as the landscape illuminated by sunshine is superior to the dim suggestion of partial obscurity. Undoubtedly in all research or teaching connected with spiritual truth, mysteries still lie beyond any that are being by degrees cleared up—stretching beyond these to all Infinity; but the more our knowledge is expanded, the better we realise that cloudiness of thought, uncertainty as we gaze upward, vagueness of expression as we attempt to put aspiration into words, are merely due to want of further knowledge. As definite and precise as our knowledge has now become in reference to the simple phenomena of chemistry, so defined and precise to a higher understanding must the conditions of spiritual life ultimately become, though to the ordinary human brain they must long remain incomprehensible. There is no inherent value in cloudiness of thought. That which we ought all

to be aiming at in dealing with any of the mysteries hitherto embraced by the vague term "occultism," is clearness and precision of understanding. The Truth, if we could comprehend it, is as clear and precise as any of those simpler truths of nature within our grasp, and the task before us is not that of continuing to treat spiritual research as something too sacred to be cramped by outline or form. There can be no spiritual truth so exalted and for us at the moment incomprehensible, which does not have as clear an outline and as defined a mental shape for consciousness working in appropriate vehicles as the simpler relationships of molecular physics already have for ourselves.

THE PLANETARY CHAIN

The first idea we had about the progress of life on planetary chains was, looking back upon it, all we could be expected to understand at the first blush. It was a huge expansion of the elementary idea that this world was the beginning of all things, and that its gradual creation could be traced in the familiar language of scripture.

The very notion of planetary chains was an entirely new one which had to be assimilated by degrees, and has needed in later years very elaborate explanation. The planetary chain that we belong to consists, as the early teaching showed, of seven globes, the first and last on the Manasic level, two others below these on the Astral level, three on the physical plane. We jumped to the conclusion in the beginning that all planetary chains were alike, consisting of seven globes, and the idea has unhappily permeated Theosophical literature to that extent that it has misled many thinkers. It is really only the middle chain of a manvantaric series that consists of seven planets; in the previous Manvantara a chain had only five; in the one before it, only three; and in the one before that, only one. I will not stop

to work out this idea in all its scientific beauty. A mere hint will be enough to show how the whole series of Manvantaras is a harmonious conception beginning with the Divine Thought—the first manasic globe—culminating in some supreme results that are beyond our present comprehension in that far away future when the whole series will be complete. But keeping our attention fixed for the moment on our present planetary chain of seven globes, the first idea we have to realise is that when we were told in the beginning about the great life wave sweeping on from world to world, and for the present occupying this earth, we were put in possession of a broad idea which is perfectly true but which requires elaboration. The *main part* of the human family to which we belong does occupy this earth at the present time, but during the various rounds of progress which have been going on for an almost incalculable past, the family has to a certain extent straggled over the whole series of worlds constituting the Chain. At present we shall find it impossible to understand the conditions of life on the super-physical planets, and we may leave them out of account for the moment; but on the three physical, including Mars behind us and Mercury in advance of us, the human family is now distributed—part of it already established on Mercury, part left behind on Mars. The explanation is simple. While the great majority swept forward to this earth, the laggard remnant not yet qualified for incarnation here remains on the planet Mars, a superior vanguard already getting forward to the planet in advance. The retarded condition of the Martian remnant—counted, of course, by a fairly large number of millions—consists of those who have (reverting to my former explanation about consciousness) failed to make the exertions required for the acquisition of superior vehicles. There is no vehicle of human consciousness on this earth amongst even the lowest savages that is not

definitely superior in some important ways to the vehicles of consciousness now inhabiting Mars. Strange to say, as often happens on the downward arc, some capacities are still active amongst them, which enable them to do things that we ourselves, in spite of our superior development, are unable to accomplish. The Martian people can handle matter by arts that we to a certain extent have lost, though the use of such arts does not represent superior intelligence any more than a spider's capacity to make a web that no human art could imitate, represents intellectual superiority on the part of the spider. Morally, the condition of the Martian people is below any level that we can easily comprehend. Their forms are to our more cultivated taste grotesquely ugly, and they practically exemplify a saying applied with less appropriateness to some savage races of our own globe: "manners they have none, and their customs are beastly." The animal life on Mars is at a low level corresponding to that of the people. It is purely reptilian in its character, and the development of taste amongst the people may be imagined from the fact that their food consists of the blood of the reptiles swarming in the vast inland lakes commonly called canals, with which the habitable portions of the planet are covered.

Even amongst the Martians the evolutionary law which presses gradually on the multitude is slowly working. Some Egos—for already the Martians must be thought of as human—gradually establish claims on a better vehicle of consciousness than those around them, and then they become qualified for incarnation on this earth, and are brought over under the guidance af oppropriate emissaries from the White Lodge in batches sometimes of fairly considerable number. I have heard of a recent case in which within the last year or two, a batch of about a hundred thousand Martian Egos were imported into this world, finding incarnation, some of them, in

the aborigines, as they are called, of Australia, some in the lowest types of Central Africa, the best of them amongst the populations of Central Asia.

The conditions on the other hand involving the premature migration of Egos from this earth to Mercury are curious and interesting when understood, but at this step of the explanation it will be more convenient to stop and take a new departure having to do with the relations of the various planetary systems or chains of our Solar System with one another.

Even in the first sketches of occult teaching as soon as the notion of the planetary chain had been established in the mind, it became clear that Egos evolving around any given planetary chain, granting free will to each, must work out different destinies. Some Egos would advance more rapidly than others, so that at a fairly advanced stage in the whole process there would be immense intervals of conditions between those in the vanguard and those in the rear. Then it was explained that at a certain stage in the development of any given planetary chain some would have fallen so far back, as compared with their more persevering companions, that physical progress for the best would have advanced to a condition in which the worst would not be qualified to make use of the forms then in process of development. In other words, and in the rougher language of our first explanations, a period is inevitable in each planetary scheme when those who cannot advance further drop off from the main current of evolution, only those who have made better use of their opportunities reaching onwards towards the final possibilities of their existence. This period used to be spoken of as the critical period of the fifth Round, and for a long time no information reached us as to what would be the final destiny, in the case of our own planetary scheme, of those who would fall off from evolution at that remote period far ahead of us, the middle of the Round destined

to succeed that with which we are at present concerned.

Later information filled up this gap in our knowledge, and in so doing threw a flood of light upon the constitution of the solar system as a whole. Obviously the senior planetary scheme, of which Venus is the physical world, has long since passed that critical period, although for us it lies so far still in the future. Already the course of events must have decided the fate of the failures of Venus at the critical period, and the answer given me when I was eventually enabled to put the question, at once showed how various planetary chains of the Solar System are not to be regarded as entirely independent undertakings. They are linked together in an extremely intelligible fashion by the fact that the Egos who become the failures of one planetary scheme pass into the evolution of the planetary scheme next in order of development; so the simple answer to the question, "Where are the failures of the Venus scheme?" is embodied in the one word, "Here!" Certainly in my own experience no one word ever before threw such light on vast regions of speculation. One saw the whole seven (or rather ten) planetary schemes, all forming part of one coherent design; one saw the reason why they were not all at this moment in similar stages of progress; one could look forward to the time when, for example, the planet Jupiter, now an incandescent mass of mineral matter, will become an inhabitated home of future races, when those which inhabit our earth will no longer number among them any beings of a less exalted spiritual rank than those we now think of as the Masters, and when the future Jupiter evolution will afford opportunities for a new beginning to those who may have dropped out of the evolutionary course designed in connection with later developments of this world.

Now we come back to the further details of the

process. The Venus failures are here; more precisely, what does that mean? In truth, although failures from the present standpoint of Venus attainment they failed at a period in the evolution of their own race already far in advance of that reached by the great bulk of our own people. None of them could be content with such incarnations as are offered to humanity at present, even by the most civilised races inhabiting this world, or at all events no such offers can be provided in anything resembling adequate abundance. The problem as thus stated almost hints at its own solution. I have already said that the planet Mercury, belonging to our chain, is actually the home of Egos constituting the vanguard of our humanity. For the moment I am leaving out of account those who, along the path, attain sublime spiritual conditions which, for that matter, make them free of all the planets of our chain. But Mercury, inhabitated by the very best, so to speak, of the human family, became a region in which the Venus failures could freely incarnate, and at the present moment "Mercury" is the more precise form of the word "here" which impressed me so much when I first heard it used in this connection.

And now let us realise more in detail the nature of the life of which Mercury is the home. In many ways it is so far superior to the conditions we are familiar with here that only by degrees can we form any conception of it. In some respects we are helped to do this by a book which, at the first glance, has nothing whatever to do with scientific occultism, —Bulwer Lytton's delightful story, "The Coming Race." We do not go far in occult study before coming into touch with the frequent occurrence of literary inspiration. Masters taking an interest in that work, and finding sensitive authorship, will constantly inspire poetry and fiction, while others indeed are inspiring scientific thought; but that need not be dealt with at this moment. The Master

who inspired Bulwer Lytton with the ideas so prettily set forth in "The Coming Race" did not, so to speak, give Himself the trouble to invent an imaginary world of dignity and beauty; He simply drew on His personal knowledge of the conditions actually prevailing on the planet Mercury—conditions absolutely familiar not merely to the great Masters, but to many of those of somewhat lesser rank, who are already able on the Buddhic plane to roam the Solar System at discretion. Perfect harmony prevails in the delightful Mercurial community; the Satanic influence which has filled this world with strife and confusion, whether we contemplate political, industrial, or international relationships, has never penetrated the peaceful regions of our beautiful sister planet. Intellectual advancement has far outstripped our own, and for many thinkers amongst us speculating on the possibilities of future sociology, it will be interesting to know that in reality on Mercury, as in Bulwer Lyttons' story, the female half of humanity is distinctly, though in no inconvenient degree, superior to and predominant over the other half. It is difficult to make the statement in any form of words which does not convey at the first glance a misunderstanding, because the very words male and female, as we use them here, have very different meanings on Mercury, especially from the physiological point of view from those we attach to the words in this less beautiful world. And again, when we talk of superiority and predominance, we can hardly keep touch with ideas that seem from our experience incompatible with those others—the ideas of perfect harmony and love. Really all these apparently conflicting principles are susceptible of combination in a perfect chord like varying notes in music, and the whole subject tempts imagination. But for the moment I must revert to the connection between Mercury conditions and the claims on nature of the Venus failures.

In its later evolution, possibly in obedience to a law which may govern other worlds, the people of Venus became very much more advanced students of beauty—among other things—than we on this world can claim to be as yet. That drift of development was already operative with the whole race before the critical period. So as a matter of fact Venus failures now on Mercury are enormously in advance of the earthly population as a whole as regards the appreciation of beauty on a level only represented amongst us, if at all, by the greatest artists of our period. Parenthetically I may here just mention a bit of information that reached me a long time ago, and seemed puzzling at the moment, concerning the peculiar Karma which in some cases makes it possible for Earthly egos to be prematurely transferred to incarnations on Mercury (I am not talking about the inner round, which is a subject apart). It is just possible for people appropriately qualified by their Karma to be thus transferred. I must not stop to go into the numerous details of the subject, but one characteristic required by people unconsciously becoming qualified for the transfer, is the artistic temperament. They must have some qualification for appropriately enjoying the heredity of Mercurial parents.

This whole department of the subject is curiously fascinating. Of course the word beauty must not be used in any narrow sense, but in one which includes the natural beauty of trees and flowers, the loveliness of colour in a landscape, the harmony of form in a structure, as well as that beauty in the feminine aspect of humanity which is perhaps the variety of beauty we all think of first when we make use of the word.

As above suggested, not quite all the Venus failures are already established on Mercury. Some, if not actually amongst us yet, are awaiting earthly incarnation, due, no doubt, to their exact place on the

scale of evolution, and are meanwhile from higher levels either on the Astral or Manasic worlds, influencing artistic thought, inspiring artistic achievement actually in progress amongst us at the present time, and this has been going on over what we are in the habit of thinking of as long periods; short, of course, as measured on the scale of natural evolution. The whole outburst of artistic capacity in Greece during that period the other day, which we call "ancient," was due to the way in which Venus failures in our higher worlds discerned in that race great capacities for the reception of their influence. Roughly speaking, all Greek art in sculpture may be regarded as having been a gift to us from the Venus immigrants, whom from the Venus point of view we must still speak of as failures.

There is something eminently suggestive in the fact that a more highly evolved, more morally and intellectually perfect a race than our own at its present stage should also be identified with beauty for that matter, not merely in regard to capacity to appreciate it, but in actual manifestation. Looking back far to the rear of our own place in evolution, we always find early forms, more or less to our senses, ugly and repulsive. The forms indeed of the degraded remnants of the human family on Mars are simply hideous, as compared even with the best examples among us. The animal life is uncouth and repulsive as compared with the animal life of this world. Doubtless there are exceptions that will leap into consciousness for everyone who thinks on the subject, but very broadly the law of nature appears to link the moral improvement of conscious beings with corresponding improvement in the beauty of form. When we understand the intricacies of Karma better than we do at present, it may be possible to find out why men and women amongst us are sometimes conspicuous at the same time for beauty of form and atrociously defective character. But ex-

ceptions without, according to the stupid proverb, "proving the rule," are at all events compatible with its operation on a large scale.

And one more suggestion in connection with this line of thought arises from definite information about the people on Mercury. Without going into indecorous detail, it is enough to say that the birth of children is absolutely unattended with distress or inconvenience for the mother. The whole business of race propagation is in point of fact so unlike our own, so infinitely more charming and attractive to the imagination, that incidentally it must mean differences in the physical conformation of men and women which may at the first glance seem to conflict with our present conceptions of perfect female beauty. And yet I am assured by one, at all events, in a position to form an opinion, that, without for a moment denying the beauty of a perfect female form of our kind at present, the perfect Mercury woman, though very different, is the more beautiful of the two. The perception of beauty is a faculty that grows and changes in its growth, and this thought reaches in both directions, so that when I have sometimes sought to ascertain why Nature's early experiments in form have generally been uncouth and ugly, I have been told they were neither from the point of view of the lowly developed consciousness they were designed to express.

THE ASTRAL WORLD

Any reference to the real conditions of astral life must bring us first of all into touch with a situation —as lamentable as it is ludicrous—that has established an almost impassable chasm between the vast body of superphysical enquirers engaged with the methods of spiritualism, and those who have appreciated what with all respect to the other I cannot but describe as the infinitely more important line of study identified with the Theosophical movement.

One might laboriously trace the way mistakes were made in the beginning, but as regards authentic teaching from the Masters, on the strength of which the Theosophical movement was launched, the subject of astral life immediately following the death of the physical body was simply neglected. Somehow we were drifted in the beginning into concerning ourselves with the gigantic principles governing human evolution on a large scale, and disregarded opportunities of understanding our immediate future better than before, in a way which painfully reminds one of the old story about the star-gazer who fell into the ditch. The pity of it, looking back, is intense. The Theosophical movement ought to have been recruited wholesale from the ranks of the spiritualists. As things have turned out, it is only a few who can be drawn across the gulf dividing most of them from our work.

But now, forgetting all this, let us turn to the accurate information which in later years some of us have been able to obtain from lofty sources of information concerning that astral world which thirty or forty years ago the spiritualists understood better than the first writers on Theosophy, but which now we are able to examine and interpret to an extent which puts the knowledge acquired by the ordinary methods of spiritualism in the background altogether.

To survey the astral world in its entirety and to comprehend its manifold varieties of condition, the survey must be on an altogether higher level of consciousness than that of the normal inhabitants. This idea which is obvious as soon as stated, is ignored altogether by spiritualists of the simpler type, who imagine that because their friend has passed to a new state of existence he must know, not merely all about it but all that relates to human destinies beyond his own condition. And many spiritualists will even accept negative testimony; a spirit who quite truly says that he cannot perceive any reincar-

nations in progress, is held by his friend on this plane to have proved that no reincarnations take place; but in thus indicating the necessary imperfection of the spiritualistic method as a means of acquiring konwledge, let me, before passing on to deal with the knowledge acquired in other ways, bear testimony to the magnificent work that has been done in the world by spiritualism in its relations with religious thinking. The growth of materialistic belief in the middle of the last century was so powerful that if entirely unchecked, it would probably have extinguished religious thinking altogether. Spiritualism, by proving that there was another life after this, and one with which we could get into touch, broke up the domination of the materialistic school in a way which no theological influence could possibly have accomplished.

Coming to detail, we find the number seven playing an important part in the astral economy as in many other ways with which we are familiar. It is a great mistake to imagine that seven as a key number, is one of any deep significance in the universe at large. It has a deep significance as regards our world, of which, after all, the astral plane is merely a part—a part as definitely objective as so much granite rock to appropriate senses of perception. To those the granite rock would hardly make an appeal. We must think of the astral world to begin with as consisting of a vast series of concentric shells entirely surrounding this Earth, the aggregate diameter of which is enormously greater than that of the physical globe. It is difficult to get measurements in miles when dealing with the region of nature in which, for some purposes, distance is almost negligible, and yet in truth there are actual magnitudes in connection with the various sub-divisions of the astral world which may actually be expressed in terms of our measurement. Enough for the moment to realise that the height above the

earths' surface to which the loftier sub-divisions of the astral world extend, is to be thought of at least in tens of thousands of miles. Then if we begin to attempt a survey of the varied subdivisions we have to recognise that the astral plane interpenetrates the physical body of the earth to a fairly considerable extent, and that the regions thus submerged below the earth's surface are horrible in their characteristics though definitely fulfilling a purpose in the divine plan of human evolution. There are two distinct concentric shells of astral matter sunk within the body of the earth. The lowest of all is one with which humanity has scarcely anything to do, or ought not to have anything to do, though in the ghastly unprecedented conditions of Satanic disturbance that we are going through, influences from that lowest astral region have been brought to the surface for our profound discomfort. Sub-plane No. I. ought to be concerned merely with the gradual disintegration of elemental forms that played a part appropriately enough in the very earliest history of this planet, but the need for which has long since expired. Level No. 2, immediately below the earth's surface, is the real Hell of actual Nature, a condition of suffering for those who drift thither that can hardly be exaggerated in imagination. That such suffering, however, is destined to be curative in its character is a fundamental idea to which in investigating that region we should always cling. It deals only with the most hideously degraded and atrociously criminal representatives of our humanity.

Without for the moment attempting to go into further detail in connection with this ghastly department of the subject, we still have to realise that when we consider Subplane No. 3, that which is the first above the surface of the physical world, we are still in touch with a purgatorial realm, the curative influences of which are appropriate to evil-doers whose iniquity falls short of that which leads to the lower

hell. Experiences on No. 3 may nevertheless be of a serious character. The misapprehension people are so liable to fall into in connection with this purgatorial condition arises from a very common tendency to take too severe a view of our own shortcomings. People taught to consider themselves miserable sinners merely because they are leading a commonplace physical life are probably, in most cases, so entirely innocent in reality that when free of the body they will slip unconsciously through the purgatorial region and wake up happily on some level of the fourth subplane. Again, the study of the purgatorial region is so intricate that imagination is misled if we dwell upon it elaborately before realising the still greater and altogether beautiful intricacies of the higher subplanes which, from the lower levels of the fourth right up to the highest, are hardly tinged with any emotion in the nature of suffering. The intricacy and complication of the vast fourth sub-plane will be readily comprehended when we think of it as the natural future home of entities as varied as the population of the earth, or, leaving out of account the humbler multitudes of uncivilised communities, the difference between individual Egos within the limits of a civilised country like our own are so enormous and elaborate that natural law has indeed a delicate task in providing all with perfectly suitable environment in the restful period between two physical lives. Close observation to begin with divides the fourth sub-plane into another septenary series, but seven is left far in the rear as a number indicative of the need such life develops for variety. On quite the lower levels of the fourth we find life carried on with such close resemblance to the conditions of physical life on this globe that when we hear of houses, theatres and amusements there, landscapes and lakes, and actual furniture in the houses, some of us start up indignantly with the idea of associating such phenomena with a spiritual condition. The

spiritual life and fleshly life are, however, closely intermingled, not merely in the living human body but in the super-physical worlds. appropriate to human existence. There are people on the astral world free of all painful embarrassments but who have not climbed beyond the conception of happiness associated with physical enjoyment. To find these still available to the astral life their aspirations in that direction must indeed be a good deal refined, and we have always to remember that the affections which play so important a part in our life even here, are still more supreme in their importance on all the happy levels of the astral world. Karma entangles incarnate life with all kinds of associations, and though it may permit us to enjoy some really congenial companionship it often forces upon us a good deal of the other kind. In the astral life, even on the fourth level, not to speak for the moment of loftier conditions, people are never thrown into companionship which is otherwise than congenial. This is one of the foremost assurances we gather from people speaking to us from the next world. Sometimes they are still with friends they have known and cared for on the earth life, but in any case with people towards whom they feel entirely sympathetic.

In attempting this sort of survey, the magnitude of the task is intimidating. We have accumulated such a vast body of detailed information concerning astral life that to use a favourite simile, one cannot see the forest for the trees; but keeping for the moment to generalities, let me attempt to indicate the leading characteristics of the vast fifth, sixth, and seventh sub-planes of the astral world. These must not be thought as definitely one superior to the other. Through the various minor sub-divisions of the vast fourth sub-plane, people do get actually promoted, as it were, from one to the other, as their qualifications for enjoying the higher regions become developed; but once attaining the highest levels of the fourth,

the other regions are reached, not so much by virtue of anything that can be thought of as promotion, but in accordance with what may much more accurately be described as individual taste. Roughly speaking, the fifth sub-plane is the region in which intellectual activity can most easily expand; the sixth is more devotional in its character, while the seventh is a region in which those Egos that have played an important public part in the Earth life find themselves in congenial companionship, and within reach of opportunities developing their own qualifications as leaders of men in preparation for future incarnations along that line of activity.

The idea just hinted at interprets the enormously significant fact that in various departments of human distinction great Egos remain by preference on the higher levels of the astral world instead of passing on, as they conceivably might, to the still more elevated conditions of the Manasic plane. Let us consider, for example, the choice to be made by the great men of science as they pass on from physical life. Assume, first, that they have no bad karma to keep them for a while on No. 3. They wake up on the highest levels of the fourth in company with congenial friends in their own line of development. They quickly learn that on the fifth, to which they can pass on at will, splendid opportunities for carrying on the scientific researches to which they may have been devoted, lie within their reach. They see that to take a forward step to the Manasic plane would break the continuity of their work—land them on levels of perception out of tune with the science they have been used to. It would carry them on to another line of development altogether. By keeping on the astral they acquire new knowledge in tune with that of their lives just spent. That will invest their Egos with expanded capacity. In the next life on Earth they will be able to carry on their work from the

point at which they left it off last, and they see the plain path of duty before them.

The same principle certainly applies to the case of the great poets of the past who are gathered together on the sixth sub-plane, though in other departments of artistic greatness complications may arise. But how about people who are not especially distinguished? Have they any choice as regards astral and Manasic destinies? Serious confusion of thought arose among Theosophical students in the beginning by reason of the way in which we happened to pick up some quite correct information about the Devachanic state. That is a condition of blissful illusion on the lower levels of the Manasic plane, appropriate to people innocent of wrong doing, of affectionate nature, but not highly qualified intellectually, or in other ways, for active work or progress on the astral plane. The mistake we made at first was to suppose that the Devachanic state was a goal to be aimed at by all. As we have come to understand the life and opportunities of the higher astral world, the mistake assumes a ludicrous aspect.

Obviously the study of astral details is an endless task, and can only be carried out thoroughly when we are in personal touch with them; but one idea not yet dealt with in this hurried survey can be understood now and claims attention. Besides that which may be broadly thought of as the stratification concentrically of the astral world, it has vast divisions that may be thought of as corresponding to the geographical divisions of this Earth. Over the great geographical areas of the Earth lie the astral regions appropriate to the people of the region below. Thus the astral regions over India and other parts of Asia are quite different in many ways from the astral regions over European countries. This does not interfere with the fact that movement from one part of the astral world to any other with the velocity of light is open to any one belonging to that

world *who knows to start with* that he has the power of getting about in that way. In truth, that knowledge only appertains to people who have been making some progress during physical life in occult study. The vast majority of perfectly commonplace people on the comfortable lower levels of the fourth subplane never want to investigate for example—the corresponding conditions of the Indian astral world. In a still more emphatic extent the Indian on the astral never thinks of its western aspect, unless he belongs to the few who have travelled west in life.

Does the geographical idea adapted to astral conditions embarrass thought in any way? Are there blank spaces corresponding to the great oceans? Not at all. The ocean spaces allow of convenient adjustments. Our British astral stretches half across the Atlantic, and no doubt impinges (though I do not remember to have heard of this as a fact) on the American astral, necessarily a very wide domain.

For those who realise the importance, as well as the possibilities of getting definite and vivid mental conceptions of super-physical Nature, this geography of the astral world is extremely significant. It all helps to make the whole complicated realm harmonious and restful for the great multitudes. For all of us there may in future be a time when nationality becomes merged in some higher attribute of exalted consciousness, but all progress is gradual. That is the foremost principle to be discerned in studying atral life. Spiritualists all recognise it, as well as those who derive super-physical knowledge in other ways. For a time people passing on are on the other side just what they were here. Especially, therefore, they are of the same nationality as here. If all the nations of the world were jumbled up together on the astral, that world would not, as it does, show us the laws and designs of Nature in perfect harmony and accord,—in that symmetrical aspect which appeals so powerfully to the intelligent observer.

That is the peculiar charm of the later Theosophical teaching. It enables all who truly understand the Theosophical movement to feel that they are engaged not merely in stimulating spiritual aspiration but in the magnificent task of creating a true spiritual science.

THE INFINITE FUTURE.

As I have endeavoured to show, in dealing with the phenomena of the astral plane, it is possible to obtain clearly defined knowledge in reference to some aspects of the super-physical future awaiting mankind. The immediately "next world" may become so vividly foreseen during our stay in this one that its importance to us may be appreciated in a way rarely attained under the influence of simple religious thought. That alone may give rise to a beautifully reverential emotion in reference to the future life, but not to the same kind of absolute confidence engendered by specific knowledge. Take an imaginary case—in illustration of what I mean—from the possible conditions of ordinary life. Suppose a young man entering some business or profession is told by some friend, "You might do better if you went to America." The young man does not deny this, but still thinks he can do fairly well at home, so he does not dwell in thought on the friend's idea. Suppose he is offered a definite engagement or opportunity in America and signs a contract to go there next year. Will he not become at once deeply interested in the conditions of residence in America? He would read books about the country, talk eagerly with travellers who had been there; fit himself out with clothes and other things appropriate to the climate he would know to be that of his future home. He would not neglect his current work, because he would know that his efficiency therein would have much to do with his

welfare in the new life; but he would look on the current work with an eye to the future, attending to it all the more zealously so far as it trained his capacity, but with a sense of detachment that would make him relatively indifferent to its immediate results.

Will the little parable fit the case of those who are—and who are not—destined to migrate at no very distant future, to the astral plane? Most people, it is true, have made no attempt to get information in advance in reference to the conditions prevailing there because they have not believed any information on the subject to be trustworthy. The misty suggestions of religious doctrines left all details obscure. Spiritualism incurred discredit in various ways, and the importance of its main revelation was imperfectly understood by the critical world at large; but now we have to deal with a fuller revelation conveyed to us by Theosophy. The history of the movement since 1880 embodies its credentials. The vision of the future is clearing up in many directions. That department which includes life on the astral plane is illuminated by a great wealth of knowledge. For all who appreciate this, that knowledge sheds light on the path they are actually treading through the current physical life, and with an expanded power of gazing into futurity; we are already beginning to concern ourselves with problems of *infinite* futurity extending far beyond the range of astral experience and physical reincarnation.

The feeling with which we do this is very unlike that which governs the investigation of astral conditions. The ultimate conditions of our humanity when the history of this world is complete are interesting only to thinkers who can deal in imagination with states of consciousness so far transcending that of any one personal life, that they are content to lose touch with the limitations which actually engender the feeling of individuality. And if, as we

may, we look beyond the limitations of the one world we seem to lose sight of ourselves. Thus the contemplation of infinite futurity is not at the first glance at all events compatible with an interest in ourselves. But none the less does it dignify all thinking, even of the kind which does relate to ourselves. We know that the continuity of our individual consciousness will never be broken. Plant us suddenly in the state we shall be in—say ten million years hence —and that would be so unlike our present state that we should not recognise ourselves. The leap would be equivalent to annihilation of our present selves. The gradual character of the change will preclude this unhappy result. So we really may discuss the problems of infinitude with composure without making the great mistake of projecting our personal limitations into infinity.

Campbell's poem—beautiful in some respects—"The Last Man," is a ludicrous illustration of this mistake. "I saw the last of human mould. That shall creation's death behold as Adam saw her prime." No doubt "The Sun himself must die," but that will not happen till the Life of the Sun, including ours, is transferred to another vehicle, and we know enough now to foresee the change. We know that our Sun is one of many constituting a stupendous Cosmos, of which the great star Sirius is the centre. We can apply the rule, "as below; so above," even to this state of things. The planets of our solar system breed their humanities, which attain perfection and pass into Divine Hierarchies. The aggregate Hierarchies of each solar system in the Sirian Cosmos must have corresponding destinies on a loftier level. With us, planet is linked with planet in accordance with a comprehensive scheme providing for the ultimate perfection of all. Beyond doubt the solar system of the Cosmos must be linked together in a somewhat similar way. And already we have learned something about their destinies which

shows these analagous to the idea underlying the succession of manvantaras in each planetary chain of our system. A sun which is in manifestation on the physical plane has in a former manvantara been a sun on a super-physical plane, and will again in some mysterious upward arc of evolution be on a super-physical plane. I avoid saying on the Astral or Manasic plane, because these terms in reference to the Cosmos must mean something very unlike their meaning in this one solar system.

All through these mighty changes the continuity of each individual consciousness concerned with them will be maintained. However overwhelming to the mind may be the character of these colossal processes of change, we can already contemplate them with open-eyed admiration, as on a lesser scale we may contemplate the splendour of a mountain range bathed in the colours of the sunset. Even natural beauty and grandeur of that order is uplifting in its effect on the emotions. So with the mental influence of attempts to gaze in thought at the infinitudes of spiritual development. By comparison our Humanity seems so small—if, indeed, we can think of it at all as the stupendous magnificence of the Cosmos is partly revealed to us. In one sense, if we can forget it, so much the better. Truth lies in some paradoxical phrases about sublime results attained by the loss of what seems everything for the moment, but paradoxes may be misleading as well as suggestive. If only by our capacity to admire, we are identified with the glories of infinitude—the realm to which, attached to it by ties that can never be broken, we eternally belong.